In the Claims:

1.   (Previously Presented) A method for providing secure communications over a network in a distributed workload environment having target hosts which are accessed through a distribution processor by a common network address, the method comprising the steps of:

routing both inbound and outbound communications with target hosts which are associated with a secure network communication through the distribution processor;

processing both inbound and outbound secure network communications at the distribution processor so as to provide network security processing of communications from the target host and network security processing of communications to the target host;

receiving at the distribution processor, network communications directed to the common network address; and

distributing the received network communications to selected ones of the target hosts so as to distribute workload associated with the network communications.

2.   (Canceled).

3.   (Original)   A method according to Claim 2, further comprising the steps of:

determining if the received network communications are secure network communications which are to be distributed to ones of the target hosts;

wherein the step of processing both inbound and outbound secure network communications at the distribution processor comprises the step of processing the received network communications so as to provide generic communications to the ones of the plurality of target hosts if the received network communications are secure network communications which are distributed to ones of the target hosts.

4.   (Original)   A method according to Claim 3, wherein the step of processing both inbound and outbound secure network communications further comprises the steps of:

receiving at the distribution processor communications from the ones of the target hosts which are associated with secure network communications; and

processing the received communications from the ones of the target hosts so as to provide network security for the communications from the ones of the target hosts.

5.   (Original)   A method according to Claim 4, wherein the communications received from the target hosts and the generic communications to ones of the plurality of target hosts are encapsulated in a generic routing format.

6.   (Original)   A method according to Claim 4, wherein the generic communications are encapsulated in a generic routing format having sufficient information in a header of the generic routing format so as to authenticate the source of the communication between the distribution processor and ones of the plurality of target hosts.

7.   (Original)   A method according to Claim 4, wherein the communications received from the target hosts at the distribution processor and the generic communications to ones of the plurality of target hosts from the distribution processor are communicated over trusted communication links.

8.   (Original)   A method according to Claim 4, further comprising the step of establishing common IP filters for communications encapsulated in a generic routing format at the distribution processor and the plurality of target hosts.

9.   (Original)   A method according to Claim 8, wherein the common IP filters bypass IP filtering for inbound communications encapsulated in the generic routing format.

10.-19.   (Canceled).

20.   (Previously Presented) A system for providing secure communications over a network in a distributed workload environment
having target hosts which are accessed through a
distribution processor by a common network address, comprising:

means for routing both inbound and outbound communications with target hosts which are associated with a secure network communication through the distribution processor;

means for processing both inbound and outbound secure network communications at the distribution processor so as to provide network security processing of communications from the target host and network security processing of communications to the target host;

means for receiving at the distribution processor, network communications directed to the common network address; and

means for distributing the received network communications to selected ones of the target hosts so as to distribute workload associated with the network communications.

21.   (Canceled).

22.   (Original)   A system according to Claim 21, further comprising:

means for determining if the received network communications are secure network communications which are to be distributed to ones of the target hosts;

wherein the means for processing both inbound and outbound secure network communications at the distribution processor comprise means for processing the received network communications so as to provide generic communications to the ones of the plurality of target hosts if the received network communications are secure network communications which are distributed to ones of the target hosts.

23.   (Original)   A system according to Claim 22, wherein the step of processing both inbound and outbound secure network communications further comprises:

means for receiving at the distribution processor communications from the ones of the target hosts which are associated with secure network communications; and

means for processing the received communications from the ones of the target hosts so as to provide network security for the communications from the ones of the target hosts.

24.   (Original)   A system according to Claim 23, wherein the communications received from the target hosts and the generic communications to ones of the plurality of target hosts are encapsulated in a generic routing format.

25.   (Original)   A system according to Claim 23, wherein generic communications are encapsulated in a generic routing format having sufficient information in a header of the generic routing format so as to authenticate the source of the communication between the distributing processor and ones of the plurality of target hosts.

26.   (Original)   A system according to Claim 23, wherein the communications received from the target hosts and the generic communications to ones of the plurality of target hosts are communicated over trusted communication links.

27.   (Original)   A system according to Claim 23, further comprising means for establishing common IP filters for communications encapsulated in the generic routing format at the distributing processor and the plurality of target hosts.

28. (Original) A system according to Claim 27, wherein the common IP filters bypass IP filtering for inbound communications encapsulated in the generic routing format.

29.-38. (Canceled).

39. (Previously Presented) A computer program product for providing secure communications over a network in a distributed workload environment having target hosts which are accessed through a distribution processor by a common network address, comprising:

a computer readable medium having computer readable program code embodied therein, the computer readable program code comprising:

computer readable program code which routes both inbound and outbound communications with target hosts which are associated with a secure network communication through the distribution processor;

computer readable program code which processes both inbound and outbound secure network communications at the distribution processor so as to provide network security processing of communications from the target host and network security processing of communications to the target host;

computer readable program code which receives at the distribution processor, network communications directed to the common network address; and

computer readable program code which distributes the received network communications to selected ones of the target hosts so as to distribute workload associated with the network communications.

40. (Canceled).

41. (Original) A computer program product according to Claim 40, further comprising:

computer readable program code which determines if the received network communications are secure network communications which are to be distributed to ones of the target hosts;

wherein the computer readable program code which processes both inbound and outbound secure network communications at the distribution processor comprise computer readable program code which processes the received network communications so as to provide generic communications to the ones of the plurality of target hosts if the received network communications are secure network communications which are distributed to ones of the target hosts.

42. (Original) A computer program product according to Claim 41, wherein the computer readable program code which processes both inbound and outbound secure network communications further comprises:

computer readable program code which receives at the distribution processor communications from the ones of the target hosts which are associated with secure network communications; and

computer readable program code which processes the received communications from the ones of the target hosts so as to provide network security for the communications from the ones of the target hosts.

43. (Original) A computer program product according to Claim 42, wherein the communications received from the target hosts and the generic communications to ones of the plurality of target hosts are encapsulated in a generic routing format.

44. (Original) A computer program product according to Claim 42, wherein generic communications are encapsulated in a generic routing format having sufficient information in a header of the generic routing format so as to authenticate the source of the communication between the distributing processor and ones of the plurality of target hosts.

45.   (Original)   A computer program product according to Claim 42, wherein the communications received from the target hosts at the distribution processor and the generic communications to ones of the plurality of target hosts from the distribution processor are communicated over trusted communication links.

46.   (Original)   A computer program product according to Claim 42, further comprising the step of establishing common IP filters for communications encapsulated in the generic routing format at the distributing processor and the plurality of target hosts.

47.   (Original)   A computer program product according to Claim 46, wherein the common IP filters bypass IP filtering for inbound communications encapsulated in the generic routing format.

48.-57. (Canceled).

58.   (New) The method according to Claim 1, wherein distributing the received network communications to selected ones of the target hosts comprises distributing network communications that use a single IP address among the target hosts to distribute workload associated with the network communications among the target hosts.

59.   (New) The method according to Claim 58, wherein distributing the received network communications to selected ones of the target hosts comprises selecting among the target hosts for distribution of the network communications that use a single IP address in response to a predefined selection pattern to distribute workload associated with the network communications among the target hosts.

60.   (New) The method according to Claim 59, wherein selecting among the target hosts for distribution of the network communications utilizing a single IP address based on a predefined selection pattern comprises selecting among the target hosts based on a round-robin pattern.

61.   (New) The method according to Claim 58, wherein distributing the received network communications to selected ones of the target hosts comprises selecting among the target hosts for distribution of the network communications that use a single IP address in response to a dynamic criteria that changes over time to distribute workload associated with the network communications among the target hosts.

62.   (New) The method according to Claim 39, wherein the computer readable program code which distributes the received network communications to selected ones of the target hosts comprises computer readable program code that distributes network communications that use a single IP address among the target hosts to distribute workload associated with the network communications among the target hosts.

63.   (New) The method according to Claim 62, wherein the computer readable program code that distributes network communications that use a single IP address among the target hosts comprises computer readable program code that selects among the target hosts for distribution of the network communications that use a single IP address in response to a predefined selection pattern to distribute workload associated with the network communications among the target hosts.

64.   (New) The method according to Claim 63, wherein the computer readable program code that selects among the target hosts comprises computer readable program code that selects among the target hosts based on a round-robin pattern.

65.   (New) The method according to Claim 62, wherein the computer readable program code which distributes the received network communications to selected ones of the target hosts comprises computer readable program code that selects among the target hosts for distribution of the network communications that use a single IP address in response to a dynamic criteria that changes over time to distribute workload associated with the network communications among the target hosts.